

INTEROPERABLE WIRELESS BROADBAND NETWORK

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, tomorrow is March 11. For most of us, this date carries no particular significance. It does, however, reflect exactly 6 months before September 11. That date we do remember and will not forget. It is 6 months from the anniversary of the worst terrorist attack ever and a day that we as a nation can never forget. It is 6 months from the date we will honor the memory of those whose lives came to an end and the way we came together, at least for a short period of time, as a nation.

With that historic date approaching, I think it important that we honor the tremendous bravery of all public safety officials. I believe this is one of the most important issues facing the country, and it is one we can do something about very quickly and reduce the budget deficit by doing so.

Our police, our firefighters, our emergency medical technicians, and the countless others who fought that day to keep us safe and who work every day to protect us from harm—we have essentially forgotten about them.

The 9/11 Commission specifically said that you have to have a system that connected all law enforcement across this Nation in an interoperable wireless system. Obviously, therefore, that is a way of saying that the best and simplest way to honor them is to give them the tools they need to be successful, to be safe, and to do their job in a way that does not expose them to needless dangers. Right now, we are not doing that.

Much as in the first gulf war, when the Army and the Navy and the Marines and the Air Force could not communicate with each other because they were all on different systems of communications—and we all kind of laughed at that as being kind of pathetic. They have solved that, sort of, but we have not solved this one at all, involving every single American and every single firefighter, policeman, and law enforcement officer, deputies, sheriffs, all across America. When it comes to public safety communications, these everyday heroes do not have the networks that they could so easily have and that they so desperately need because we have not acted. It is the 10-year anniversary coming up 6 months from now—we have not acted.

Too often, first responders lack that interoperable network that is essential to providing an effective response in emergencies, all kinds of emergencies—a lot of them very desperate, not all of them catastrophic, but there is always that potential. They don't have the ability to communicate with one another. They don't have the ability to communicate with other agencies. They don't have the ability to communicate with other cities and States across State lines. They cannot do that. It is kind of pathetic in the age of the Internet. We have chosen to do nothing. Instructed by the 9/11 Com-

mission to do something a long time ago, we have done nothing. This hampers our ability to respond to a crisis, this lack of equipment. Whether that crisis is a terrorist attack or a natural disaster, it puts lives in unnecessary peril.

I believe it is time to do something about it. In the Commerce Committee, we happen to take that approach. That is why I introduced S. 28, the Public Safety Spectrum and Wireless Innovation Act. This legislation does two things. First, it sets aside the 10 megahertz of spectrum known as the D-Block. I don't know why it is called the D-Block, but it is the D-Block. Its 10 megahertz adds on to the 10 megahertz they already had, making 20, which means they could do the whole thing, completely connect with each other, every sheriff, police person, law enforcement, Federal, State, county, municipal. They would all be on one system and talk to each other from a common communications base and a common database. It is an interoperable wireless broadband network that we have to have, and it is that which we do not have. We do not have it because we have not made the effort.

Secondly, it gives the Federal Communications Commission the authority to do something very interesting: to hold incentive auctions based on the voluntary return of spectrum which is not necessarily being used by a whole variety of people who just want to hold on to it. It is better to hold on to something than to give it, but we give them an incentive on a voluntary basis—crucial word in this legislation—on a voluntary basis to return that spectrum. In turn, these auctions will provide the funding to support the construction and maintenance of the public safety network which they need and which I have been speaking about, and they free up additional spectrum for innovative commercial uses.

In short, this bill marries resources for the first responders with good commercial spectrum policy. It can keep us safe and help our economy grow. That is why the legislation has the support of absolutely every major public safety organization across this country, obviously including those of my State. That is why this bill also has strong support from all Governors and all mayors across this country. They have to deal with this. We do not; they do. That is why we now have the support of the administration.

I urge my colleagues to support the Public Safety Spectrum and Wireless Innovation Act. To those who say we cannot afford to do this now, obviously I would say we cannot afford not to. The role of intelligence reveals all kinds of things going on not only outside the country but inside the country, implying there is a target, or many of them, within this country.

But if this is not compelling enough, I think it is important for people to know this. This legislation pays for itself, plus does not cost a dime. Ac-

cording to the White House and even the industry itself, the telecommunications industry, incentive auctions will bring in revenue so much above what funding public safety requires, it will leave billions over that amount for, for example, deficit reduction. I am talking a whole lot of deficit reduction. Billions and billions. So it is a win-win-win.

I close. Let me say we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to provide our public safety officials with the spectrum they need to communicate when tragedy strikes. We have chosen not to do that. Now there is this sort of malicious pressure of the 9/11 Commission's directive to us to do our duty as a country to the people who keep us safe.

More than that, we do need to keep this country safe, and it is not always going to be safe. We do not know when the next attack will come. So we have the incentive auctions, which are voluntary, but they will work. They can be sold for lots of money, and we will have, therefore, lots of money over and above what it costs to build this interoperable wireless broadband system across the entire country, connecting every law enforcement official to every other one.

To my colleagues I say, let's seize this moment. This is not Republican, this is not Democrat, it is simply the right thing to do. I ask people to think back to those images of 9/11, of that day, not just the 9/11 Commission report that emanated from that, why we could not stop that, but to think of the images of that day, of what those people absorbed in their lungs, the natural instinct for firefighters to come from all over the country, policemen to come from all over the country, ambulance people to come from all over the country, to New York City, a city which they do not start out loving generally out there in the hinterlands. But they knew this was a crisis, they reacted, they saved lives, they imperiled their own, and many of them lost their lives.

Let's do something historic, and let's do it together, and let's do it here in this Congress. And, certainly, let us get this all done before the 10th anniversary of September 11.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President. We are borrowing over \$5 billion per day.

That's \$35 billion borrowed per week to run our government, totaling over \$1.5 trillion in borrowed money just to run for a year.

Harvard's great economic historian, Niall Ferguson, noted that the decline of a country can be marked when it pays its moneylenders more than its army. His classic case comes from the French monarchy of the 1780s who failed to make interest payments on